

CRASH: Zumwalt immediately placed Poffenberger and McBride on administrative leave

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homemade peach cobbler, and a half hour later Plum drove Poffenberger home. McBride said he drank throughout the night but stopped once he was home.

Around 10 p.m., Plum crashed his Toyota Tacoma through the guardrail of an irrigation canal bridge at Hinkle Motel Road south of Feedville Road, Hermiston. The crash occurred on Union Pacific Railroad property near its Hinkle rail yard. Plum was uninjured and called his wife, Deanna Plum, and then called McBride to help pull the pickup from the ditch.

McBride used his neighbor’s “big jacked-up” pickup to do the pulling. A woman who made the cobbler and joined the group in Echo drove the rig, and the neighbor also went along.

Plum did not call 9-1-1 or the county dispatch non-emergency number to report the crash.

Around 10:20 p.m. Reggie Freels, a reserve officer with Stanfield police, caught sight of two vehicles with lights off in the roadway. He drew closer and saw a white van and the wrecked pickup.

The Plums were there, but nothing in the report indicates Freels knew them. Al Plum said he was OK, “everything was fine” and people were coming. He also mentioned something about lighting a cigarette.

Freels drove out of sight and called Toombs, his supervisor.

The Stanfield police lieutenant arrived minutes later. McBride and company were there by then, and

McBride was hooking up a chain to try and tow Plum’s pickup. The vehicle was totaled, according to Toombs, and the bridge sustained severe damage.

Toombs reported Deanna Plum claimed she was driving, swerved to miss a deer and crashed, but later said it was a smaller animal. Toombs also said Al Plum reeked of alcohol.

Poffenberger showed up for a moment, and Toombs sent McBride home. Toombs at 10:53 p.m. is the first to report the crash to Oregon State Police. He told trooper Mark Amos that deputy Plum crashed his pickup and appeared intoxicated. Toombs asked Amos to investigate because of McBride’s involvement. Amos arrived around 11:30 p.m. because he was not familiar with the area.

Toombs reiterated to the trooper the story about Deanna Plum driving but said she “sounded as if she was making it up on the fly,” and her husband appeared to be “going along with the story.”

Amos took a statement from Freels, then questioned McBride shortly after midnight and asked about Deana Plum’s involvement.

McBride claimed he did not know if she had left his house with her husband and Poffenberger, but her van was now at his house and she had not been to dinner with them.

Amos then questioned Al Plum in the back of his police car.

“I told him I didn’t want to hear any lies,” according to the state police report, “and that I was pretty sure I already knew what happened.”

Plum claimed he tried to light a

cigarette while driving too fast, did not make a curve and panicked after the crash. He said his last drink of alcohol was back in Pendleton.

Amos noted Plum’s eyes were bloodshot and he had a “faint odor” of alcohol. Plum exhibited “two out of six clues of impairment” on an eye test for drunkenness but otherwise passed field sobriety tests.

Amos did not arrest him for driving under the influence of intoxicants, but cited him for careless driving.

The outcomes

Zumwalt immediately placed Poffenberger and McBride on administrative leave. He then reached out to Boardman police Chief Rick Stokoe for advice on the situation he was facing.

Stokoe suggested Boardman police do the investigation, he said during a phone interview Friday.

“Usually it makes it cleaner, more transparent, to have another agency do an internal,” he said.

A couple of days later, Zumwalt accepted Stokoe’s offer. Stokoe said it was a credit to Zumwalt that he held his officers accountable.

“We’re not exempt from the law,” Stokoe said.

The Boardman chief sent Dieter, and he and Sheriff’s Sgt. Roberts spent Aug. 10 and 11 questioning each officer and others, and they interviewed McBride again on Aug. 25.

McBride told investigators he knew the crash was on private property, but trespassed to help a friend and would do so again. He said he believed others called police. He

expressed his dislike of Toombs. He questioned why Freels was even in the area.

McBride also said he was not suspicious of the circumstances of the crash until the day after.

Plum also gave evasive answers, and Dieter noted “it was obvious from Plum’s body language, demeanor and verbiage that he was not being completely forthcoming with me.”

Dieter’s last interview was of Amos on Sept. 8. Amos recounted McBride “was dancing around” and “avoiding the answer” regarding why Deanna Plum’s van was at his house, and “tried to give the impression that Plum’s wife had been at the house.”

Dieter in his conclusion to the report found “McBride was not being completely forthcoming with his knowledge of the crash and the events that occurred after he arrived at the scene and thereafter.” McBride and Poffenberger trespassed, according to Dieter, and McBride “violated multiple policies as well as the trust and respect of law enforcement and his community.”

County records show Plum worked for the sheriff’s office from Dec. 17, 2007, until he resigned Aug. 31, 2015, four days after he pleaded no contest to the lone violation of careless driving. Umatilla County Sheriff Terry Rowan referred questions about Plum to county counsel Doug Olsen, who said he would look into releasing Roberts’ investigation.

Larsen said he held off on firing McBride until the investigation was concluded and the district attorney’s

office could “answer an associated question.” He did not specify what that was, but McBride as yet faces no criminal charges, according to court records.

The future

The *East Oregonian* could not reach Zumwalt for comment. Toombs declined to comment at this time. They are the subjects of an Oregon Department of Justice investigation into misconduct and are on paid leave. Larsen during a closed-door meeting Tuesday night with the city council said he expected the justice department to finish the investigation soon, and those findings would go to the district attorney’s office.

Larsen said he did not think either officer would face criminal charges stemming from McBride’s accusations, but they would need to be more professional in their police work.

Stokoe suggested the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police could help Zumwalt and his department. The association conducts reviews of troubled agencies and makes recommendations for improvement.

“I think if Bryon comes back, I think he will do (put the department under review),” Stokoe said. “He wants to do the right thing.”

That idea also came up at the city council session. Zumwalt as chief would have to make the request. Larsen said that would help rebuild the public’s trust in the department.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

HOMELESS: Spends nights at Hermiston Warming Station when it’s too cold to sleep in her car

Continued from 1A

occupants trespassed. Volunteers for Hermiston Parks and Recreation cleared out a stand of brush off Theater Lane. The 14-day limit for camping at Sand Station is being more strictly enforced. And the city of Umatilla cleared out homeless camps along the Umatilla River and outlawed tent dwelling within the city limits.

Ministry volunteers say they’re not entirely sure where many of the area’s homeless are spending their nights. Lund said she hasn’t seen several of her homeless friends around town recently.

It takes a certain resourcefulness to piece together a life with no permanent shelter.

When it’s too cold to sleep in her car, Lund sleeps at the Hermiston Warming Station. On cold days when that isn’t open, she will stay awake all night, killing time inside Wal-Mart until it closes at 1 a.m. and then moving to a fast food restaurant that stays open 24 hours a day.

Breakfast is at Desert Rose Ministries, a small church on Main Street that offers coffee and oatmeal in the mornings. For a mid-day meal Lund knows which businesses offer free popcorn to customers, and in the evenings she might purchase food or get something at the Warming Station.

Lund said her income is made collecting cans or buying things at garage sales and reselling them to second hand stores at a higher price.

“I try to make a little money every day,” she said.

Lund gets her clothing



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Pamela Lund looks through her belongings in the back of her car for a pack of cigarettes on Friday near Wal-Mart in Hermiston.

from local charitable efforts or from the lost and found at laundromats. She showers three times a week at the Agape House, which offers showers to homeless residents for \$1. That service has been a “godsend,” she said.

“You know what the hardest thing (about being homeless) is?” she said. “It’s a shower. My hygiene is very important to me.”

She joked that when she finally gets her own place again someday, she’ll have a photo on the wall of herself standing in her new bathroom, grinning from ear to ear, because having her own bathroom is the thing she most looks forward to.

She has been on the list for Section 8 housing since last summer, and said she was told that it would probably take between eight months and two years to get a place. In the meantime, the only local homeless shelter is Martha’s House, operated by Eastern Oregon Mission, which is reserved for families

who meet certain criteria.

“There aren’t a lot of resources for a woman my age without children,” she said.

Jason Estle said he started Desert Rose Ministries in part to help people like Lund. Being homeless can really eat away at someone’s self-worth, so Estle said he and other ministry members try to not only meet physical needs, but also provide support and positive conversation. Church members always make sure visitors know they will be prayed for by name, even if they don’t return.

“There isn’t a person on this planet that God doesn’t love, but some people feel unlovable,” he said.

That’s why they might stop applying for jobs after three or four rejections, he said, or give up on themselves in other ways.

“We had a woman come in and said she wanted some clean clothes because she wanted to go find a job,” he said. “When you hear that,

that’s exciting. It takes a lot of courage to pick themselves back up again.”

Others have had run-ins with the law, he said, and tell him they are afraid that a home or job will make it easier for the police to find them. Estle said he always encourages them to do what they need to in order to get square with the law so that they can pay their debt to society and move on with their lives.

He said Desert Rose Ministries used to bring hot meals, sleeping bags and other items to homeless camps in the area but have had trouble finding them lately. He said he heard that

some people were camping along the Umatilla River somewhere between Hermiston and Umatilla.

“We’ve looked for them,” he said.

Trish Rossell, a volunteer with the Hermiston Warming Station, said she has been surprised to see fewer guests than expected this winter. They have been seeing two to six per night, she said, despite the larger space at the ARC building this year. To increase numbers, Rossell said they are providing blanket-wrapped kennels for dogs on the porch. New Hope Church is also taking a van around in the evenings to 11th Street Market, Safeway,

Wal-Mart and Fiesta Foods to pick clients up.

“We do have some regulars that count on us,” she said.

Rossell said she thinks some people who were camping over the summer have switched to couch-surfing, while she heard some people were traveling to the Tri-Cities in search of more resources.

“I don’t think there are fewer homeless people, I think they’re doing different things about their homelessness,” she said.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

BRIEFLY

Report of gun briefly put some schools on lockdown

PENDLETON — A false alarm briefly locked down Lincoln Primary School, West Hills Intermediate School and Pendleton High School Friday morning.

According to a Pendleton School District press release, a parent dropping off a child at Lincoln reported to have seen an adult with a weapon outside the school.

After responding to the call, Pendleton police located the person and determined there was no threat, returning Lincoln, West Hills and the high school to normal operations.

“Safety comes first in our district, and procedures were followed correctly this morning,” Assistant Superintendent Tricia Mooney said.

Council work session to focus on parks and transportation

HERMISTON — The Hermiston city council meeting has no new business on the agenda for its regular meeting on Monday, but there is a work session before the meeting.

The hour-long work session, which will begin at 6 p.m., will be a discussion between council members and city staff about the budgets for public transportation and parks and recreation in 2016-2017.

The regular session, which will begin at 7 p.m., will be comprised of the monthly reports from city committees, the mayor, council members and city manager.

Hermiston City Council meetings are the second and fourth Monday of every month at 7 p.m. at city hall, 180 N.E. Second St.

Livable Hermiston Committee hosting open house

HERMISTON — The Livable Hermiston Committee is hosting an open house to gather in-person feedback from community members.

The event will be Wednesday, Jan. 13 from 4-6 p.m. in the Lanham Meeting Room at the Hermiston Public Library.

The committee has been tasked with creating a prioritized list of where Hermiston residents would most like to see the city spend money on making Hermiston a more livable place.

A survey of more than 2,000 residents revealed that residents would like to see the city spend money on a community activity center, an indoor aquatic center, an arts and culture facility, revitalizing downtown and expanding city parks and trails.

The committee encourages citizens to drop by at any time during the event for refreshments and a chat with committee members about their ideas for making Hermiston a more livable place.

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WHEN: Saturday, January 16, 2016 11:00 a.m.

WHERE: The Community Room at City Hall
500 S.W. Dorion Street, Pendleton

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